RPG Reload Developer Spotlight 003 – Kepa Auwae from RocketCat Games

It's time for the next installment in our monthly series of articles looking at the developers and publishers behind some of our favorite games. The aim here is for you readers to get a sense of the person, so the tone is more conversational than we usually use in interviews here at TouchArcade. it's also not necessarily about the games themselves, either. Basically, we'll kick off and see where the conversation takes us. This month, we're speaking to Kepa Auwae of RocketCat Games. Things get pretty zany here, so pack your sense of humor, friends.

For this transcript, my words will be bolded, while Kepa's will be in regular text. This is in response to a comment on the last post that helpfully mentioned I had been doing things backwards. And now, let's get to the interview.

Hi! I think our readers probably know who you are, but just in case they don't, could you let them know who you are, what you're about, and favorite pizza toppings?

Pizza toppings...alright, I need to think about that for a little bit. My name's Kepa, I own Rocketcat Games. We made *Hook Champ* (Free), *Super QuickHook* (Free), *Hook Worlds* (Free), *Mage Gauntlet* (Free), *Wayward Souls* ($7.99), *Death Road to Canada*, *Five Card Quest* ($2.99), and I think my favorite pizza topping is just pepperoni, because that's the one I get the most.

Okay, that works. I'm not a fancy person either. I'm pretty much all

about pepperoni and bacon.

I get the topping that everyone else wants, really.

That's the diplomatic way to do it, anyway.

Yeah, pepperoni's a crowd-pleaser.

You don't want to be that controversial person that asks for pineapple!

So, I also do a lot of the design stuff for the games. I mean, writing, level design. Most of the gameplay is my responsibility, stuff like that.

Okay. So, I think just about every game you listed there is pretty well-known by most iOS gamers...

Well, I wouldn't go that far!

Well, okay, by *our* audience.

There we go. Oh, *Punch Quest* [(Free)](#)! I forgot to mention *Punch Quest*!

Yeah, how could we forget *Punch Quest*?

It's free, so it's not a real game.

Oh, that's true, that's true. *Punch Quest* was actually the first game of yours that I played.

Well, it was free.

I got it when it was paid!

Oh yeah, I forgot about that!

Yeah, I got my iPhone really late, actually. I got my first one in 2011.

So did I, actually. I had an iPad so we could test stuff, but I didn't actually get

an iPhone until...wait, I still don't have an iPhone. I still just use the iPad 2.

I got mine late so I swung around to TouchArcade, because that was a site I'd heard of, and I think Brad was going on about *Punch Quest*, just raving about it. I thought, yes, this sounds agreeable. I think I played it for, like, a few weeks straight. My wife was getting so tired of it.

I think *Punch Quest* is actually our best-designed game.

It's awesome. It's one of those games where you're playing and it just feels bad-ass.

It was inspired by a game, I think it was on Something Awful, that used *River City Ransom* sprites. It was about kicking a ball and never letting it hit the ground. That was a loose inspiration for *Punch Quest*, the whole juggle system.

That's cool. Well, that's a great game, but I've enjoyed a lot of your games since then. *Wayward Souls*, I wrote the review for, so I'm pretty familiar with that one. I did the RPG Reload article for *Mage Gauntlet*, so

I certainly spent some time with that one as well. I can't say I've spent much time with *Hook Champ* and the other earlier games. That was a little before my time and... are they working still?

Uh, kind of? We need to go back and update it, but it's tricky because if you go back and update a game that is that old, it'll make it so it won't run on any of the old devices. I'm not sure if that's a can of worms we want to open.

Yeah, I could see that.

It's pretty difficult because of the whole obsolescence thing. There's definitely a huge push towards obsolescence for these devices.

Yeah, that lovely message that we get regular tweets from random people about with regards to the TouchArcade App. This may slow down your device! I do want to try those games, though, because I love that kind of *Bionic Commando* swinging-type gameplay. I just never really picked them up.

On Recent and Current Projects

I think one of your unsung games is *Five Card Quest*. How did that come about? Because that's kind of a smaller thing than what you usually do, right?

Uh yeah, I just wanted to mess around with a turn-based RPG that was really quick to play, and tactical. Something really simple. I'm going to try that genre again pretty soon, I think.

I mean, you had pretty good results the first time. There were some balance things that I think you got a lot of feedback from people about, but pretty good effort for a first stab at it.

Yeah, we didn't get to update that one as much as we wanted, because it

didn't sell enough to justify it.

Right now, you're doing *Death Road to Canada*, that's kind of the big active project, right?

Oh yeah, that's about to make more on PC than *Wayward Souls* did.

Oh wow, so that's a pretty big success. Excellent. That's coming to iOS, but what's the time schedule for that? Do you have anything laid down?

We're hoping January or February. We tried to do it earlier, but if you don't get in by, like, mid-October so you can launch in early to mid-November, you really have to skip the rest of the year, because of how the store works.

Death Road to Canada: Max

It's probably just as well. I feel like the last couple of months have been a bloodbath in terms of huge games coming out and blindsiding indies.

Yeah, that's why. (laughing)

You could run against Mario. Can't see any harm in that!

Hmm, I think I could take him. I could take Mario. (laughs)

I think so! What do they call that, counter-programming? What's the opposite of Mario? (laughing)

Uh, it's *Pokemon*, probably.

Well, okay. I think there's already a few games like *Pokemon* on there, so...

There's at least one!

At least one.

On RocketCat's Formation and Good Personal Hygiene

Let's go back a little. So you started RocketCat. Can you tell us a little bit about that? Like, why did you do that, what was your experience before making games, you know? Origin story.

I did it for arbitrary reasons. I had no experience with games before. I was a pediatric nurse. I just decided to kind of take a stab at it, with a couple of friends who also had no experience making games. And then we made *Hook Champ*. That's pretty much it!

Wow, okay.

They were online friends, too. I didn't even see them for years. I still haven't seen one of them, the programmer. And I didn't see the artist, Brandon, until several years after. I think it was year four that I knew what he looked like because he moved over here.

Well, you know, I've been at TouchArcade for over three years and I

haven't met any of the other staffers face-to-face.

You probably don't want to!

I've heard that Jared is dangerously violent.

I met him years ago and I never bothered going back!

He's a shady guy, you can tell because of the beard.

(both laughing)

So what does your average day look like as a game developer?

I wake up, and then I drink coffee. Then I work on a game for, like, twelve hours. Then I play a mobile game for a little bit. I'm playing *Crusaders Quest* right now. Like, as I'm talking to you. And then I go to sleep. There's some other stuff in there, like I still bathe every day.

That's important! I think a lot of people in the games business, media and developers alike, don't get enough bathing time.

No, I do. I don't smell funny.

Okay. Do you give proper attention to the rubber duckie?

No, that's more of a bath thing. I don't take sit-down baths. Maybe that's still a thing, I'm not sure?

I don't know if that is a thing or not. I'm in Japan, so we've got the whole shower and bath combo.

Oh yeah, you've got the bidets, too, right?

Right.

What's that like?

Um, yeah, I don't know. It's alright.

It's just alright?

It's, um, shocking at first? Especially if you do it accidentally the first time?

Yeah, I heard about the buttons.

The buttons can be, um...well, they've got pictures on them, so if you're observant, it's pretty clear which one is going to do what. But I'm not an observant guy.

Would you like to explain that for the readers?

Oh yes, so there are two separate buttons for splashing water from the toilet up into your hindquarters when you're sitting on it.

Your butthole?

That's right. There is a that button, and then there is a button for the

ladies. Um, if you are a dude, do not hit the ladies button.

What happens?

You get targeted in that particular location, and, you know, that's probably not where you're expecting a jet of cold water to hit. Then there are about ten other buttons on the toilet. You have to be careful you don't push the button that turns the toilet into a Gundam because that can pinch.

Will that kill you?

Um, if you tuck in right, you should be okay, but there's a high risk of maiming. You want to be careful there.

On Favorite Games and Things That are not Toilets

I don't even know how we got here, but let's get the train back on the tracks that doesn't involve water splashing on our rears. You mentioned that you play *Crusaders Quest*. Do you have any other mobile games you really like, or any other games in general?

No.

No? Okay.

(laughing) You gave up on that so easily.

Well, you know, I know what it's like to have a busy schedule and have no time to play anything for fun.

I pretty much get to play one thing at a time nowadays. So usually it's a game that I play for a hundred hours and then stop playing it. The last one I played was *Dark Souls 2*, if I remember right. Or maybe it was *Payday 2*? I can't remember.

Well, they *are* pretty similar.

They both have the word 'two' in them.

They do, and I've heard that *Payday 2* is the *Dark Souls* of the *Payday* series.

Yeah, I hear that a lot, too.

What are some of your all-time favorite games?

Uh, *Crusaders Quest. Dark Souls 2*. The last two games I played. I really like traditional roguelikes, or I did. I kind of stopped playing them. I like *NetHack* and *Dungeon Crawl Stone Soup*. That was a big one, but I got tired of it. I really liked Super Nintendo action RPGs, so that's usually a pretty big inspiration for the stuff I make. I was a big *Quake* fan, especially the mods. *Half-Life 1*. *Doom* was a big one. They're still making *Doom* mods, really good ones.

Well, that's good. I tend to feel that the first-person shooter genre

peaked somewhere between *Doom* and *Quake*. I'm weird.

Half-Life 1 was really great.

Yeah, it's cool, but I almost felt like what it inspired ended up shifting the genre in a direction that wasn't really where my personal preferences went. But there's always *Serious Sam*, so I'm fine.

You'll always have *Serious Sam*. But I don't play them anymore. I don't play any of the modern first-person shooters.

They're a pretty different genre now. That comes with big success, I think. The genre falls into a bit of a formula.

On Other Interests and Future Plans

So, non-gaming stuff. What do you like to do?

It's a tough one. I like to talk about Japanese toilets.

Okay, me too.

I watch TV series every once in a while.

What's your favorite TV series right now?

Uh, let's see. Nothing right now, actually. Everything is between seasons. The last thing I saw was *Stranger Things*, that was pretty good. Before that, *Game of Thrones*, the latest season.

Right on. So you mentioned Super Nintendo RPGs, I'm guessing the main one there is *Secret of Mana*?

Yeah.

One of the things *Secret of Mana* had was a multiplayer mode. Have you ever given a thought to doing that kind of thing in any of your future games?

I'd like to. *Death Road* has a local one, and I'd like to do online co-op. That's not a promise or anything, though. Either for *Death Road* or... well, we're planning to do a follow-up to *Wayward Souls* after we finish the PC version, which would be in January or February, too. This would also be after the iOS update, which is in the same time period. Imagine *Wayward Souls* but with a faster pace and built around online multiplayer. That's the goal.

That sounds pretty awesome, actually. I would definitely be down for that. *Secret of Mana* is a good game single-player, but when you get two or even three people playing, that's really something.

Oh yeah, it was always fun multiplayer. And of course, *Mage Gauntlet* and *Wayward Souls* is, like, us taking *Secret of Mana* and messing with the design a lot.

It's interesting because you went in two very different directions there,

but you can feel that similar core.

On the iOS Market and How it Compares to PC

So you've done some PC stuff now, and some PC ports. *Death Road* is a PC-debut title. Of course, you have a history on mobile. How would you say that those markets are different?

I don't have a ton of experience in PC yet. I've just got the one game. On PC, it seems that sales matter a lot. Like, you can do a little sale and your profits will double for a week. We never did iOS sales because we thought the sales just hurt. It wouldn't make a big difference, and you know, the whole race to the bottom thing. With Steam, the sales are a lot more controlled, so we finally experimented with doing sales on there. And they're not very big sales, I don't think *Death Road* will ever go past, say, 30% or 33% off on sale. Not like the huge discounts you see where it's 75% off or whatever. I don't think we're going to do iOS sales anytime soon for anything. Maybe for a future title, I don't know. Could change my mind on that.

Okay.

But yeah, I'm not sure what the differences are between the two markets yet. I hear that PC has a way longer tail, but on the other hand, we've had an incredibly long tail with *Wayward Souls*. It's still selling a decent amount of copies per day, it's pretty crazy.

That's good news. I know you had a bit of an unpleasant experience with what happened with *Punch Quest*, is that right?

Oh, for a month or two, yeah, but we fixed it. The thing is, we got it out and it was way too generous and no one paid for anything in it. So we made it paid briefly while we figured out what to do. Then we made it free again, but we changed the prices of everything to make it, like, five times more expensive. Which is still really generous. It's still one of the most generous free games

on the market. But it just completely solved the whole pay thing. It's too bad we didn't do that in the beginning because we would have made probably double the money.

But *Wayward Souls* has performed to your expectations, then?

Oh yeah, beyond. It's kept us going for a long time and funded three different game projects.
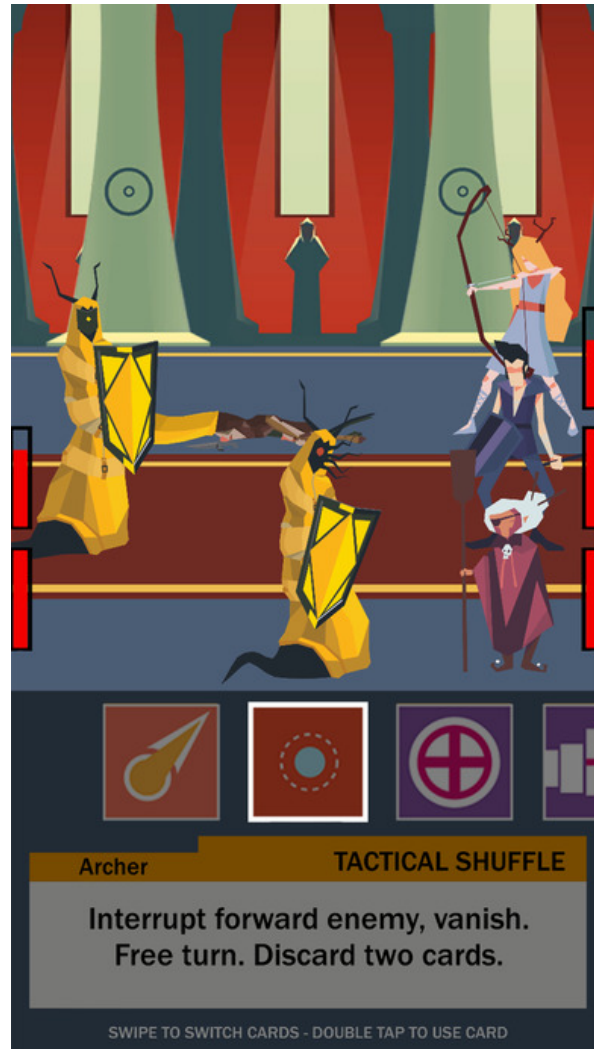
That's awesome. So really the only one that's come in under your expectations is *Five Card Quest*?

That's the only one that didn't make its money back.

Well, everyone reading this, go buy *Five Card Quest*, we don't want to break this pristine streak.

I don't know if I recommend it.

Really? Okay. You heard it from Kepa, Kepa says don't buy *Five Card Quest*. (laughing)

Yeah, buy *Wayward Souls*. Buy a second copy. Buy *Death Road to Canada* when it comes out, that would be good.

I think they're going to buy it anyway, man. There's a lot of buzz for that game.

We have to get the TestFlight out soon.

Yes, I believe I'm the only one at TouchArcade who hasn't laid hands on it yet. I'm just constantly getting dissed by people, geez!

(laughing) You might drop it in your weird-ass toilet, so...

Well, that was my first plan.

We'll probably wait until around mid-December and then get people in on a semi-public test on the TouchArcade forums. I don't know, in a couple weeks, or a week, something like that.

Okay, I'm holding you to that.

I meant to do it before, but everything just kind of slipped past. Mostly due to some stuff we wanted to get into the iOS version, some special stuff.

That's good, as long as it's because of special treats for us.

Special treats...

We demand special treats, and we will not pay more than $0.99 for them. Just joking, we actually will not even pay $0.99 for those treats. You're going to give those treats to us for free, and after you give us those treats for free, 1% of us are going to buy $1000 in-game treats, and keep the businesses running.

Nice.

Actually, it's 0.1%, that was a lie.

Yeah, it works out though.

It's such a strange business now! (laughing)

On Paid Games and Long-Running Franchises

Are there any paid games anymore that come out?

There are, but I don't know that there are any big successes in paid original stuff. This year's been... I think *Crashlands* did really well in paid this year. Um, other than that, it seems like it's just modest success now in paid games. I think it's if you have an audience that you can target. It reminds me of the PlayStation Vita where it's a really small install base, but they're very in tune with what's coming for their tastes, so you can pull reasonable numbers as long as you keep your budget under control.

Okay.

That's kind of the paid games market right now. Which is why you, for example, probably will not see Square Enix doing a whole lot more in

original paid games, but the ports are definitely profitable.

Yeah, I don't even know why they did original games when they can just port a *Final Fantasy* of their choosing again.

I think at this point they're running out of *Final Fantasy* games.

They can always port a remake or something!

That's true. They already pulled the desperation move of porting the entire *Dragon Quest* series, and let me tell you, English fans care about those.

How many of those are there now?

Technically, there are ten in the series, but the tenth one is an online game.

I thought there were more.

Just ten. There's an eleventh one coming, which they're doing a strange thing for. They've got two different versions, PlayStation 4 and 3DS.

So what *Final Fantasy* are they on?

They wisely skipped *Final Fantasy 8* and did *9*, so we've got *1* through *7* plus *9*, plus *Tactics*. But we do not have *8*. We'll probably get *10* because they've got that PC port that will likely work on mobile tech a couple of years from now.

Okay.

But they are running out, because after *10*, there's *12*, which I guess is feasible, *13*, which they've already got streaming in Japan on mobile. Then *11* and *14* are online, so I don't know what they're going to do with

those. They're supposed to be porting *11*, but I don't know what's going on with that.

Didn't they do a thing where there was a *13 part 2* or whatever? Where one of them is like four games?

Yeah, there's *13-2*, and *Lightning Returns*, which is *13-3*. This is something you might want to look into, doing sequels to sequels within your own series, without giving them a new number.

That's what they do now. Like, the *Call of Duty* series, they keep getting rid of the number to trick people into not remembering that there are twenty of them.

I don't blame them, though. *Final Fantasy 15* is coming out this week, and you look at that number and think, hunh.

It's worse when you get to *Final Fantasy 19*, when you think about it.

I mean, no one is interested in *19*, it's all about *20* at that point. At least

with *Final Fantasy*, the games are separate. I think *Call of Duty* is doing one continuous timeline, with shared characters and stuff. I think there's a timeline chart.

Nice, just like the *Zelda* timeline, except no one cares.

Here's what you need to do, Kepa. Deep lore. You need deep lore in your games.

I don't think there's any need for that until you get to, like, the twelfth game in your series.

Well, Nintendo did it in *Zelda*.

Nintendo did it because they had to do it eventually.

I think they just did it to sell books. They wanted to sell anniversary books and tried to figure out what they could put in there that people would want to buy. Let's canonize that silly split timeline theory!

The three split timelines. Maybe four.

Could be a fifth one coming up.

How does *Mario Tennis* fit into the *Zelda* timeline?

You know, technically, you *can* link them together because Wart from *Super Mario Bros. 2* is in *Link's Awakening*.

Was he?

He was! It's not explicit in the English version, but his name is Mamu in Japan. He teaches you one of the songs in *Link's Awakening*, I think.

Link's Awakening is really good. The perfect size to make a game like that. I'd love to make a *Mage Gauntlet* sequel modeled after *Link's Awakening*.

I'd like to see that. I thought it was interesting having stages, the way *Mage Gauntlet* was set up, but I would certainly like to see an overworld-type thing going on.

Yeah, a small-scale open world, those are pretty cool. I think for the *Wayward Souls* follow-up we're doing, it's going to be more story-focused like *Mage Gauntlet*. It's going to be a small-scale open world where you get to go through the entire castle. So that should be coming next year sometime.

Oh really? That soon? Nice.

On Upcoming Projects and the Future of RocketCat

We've been sitting on a lot of stuff for a long time. We just haven't been able to announce anything because we've been working on the *Wayward Souls* stuff.

Okay, so this is kind of an announcement?

Sort of. We've mentioned it before, but…

Well, if it's hidden in one of my articles, only thirty people are going to see it anyway.

I can just talk about anything then!

You can talk about literally anything.

I have been!

Especially this deep in the interview, almost no one is reading anymore. They're just going to skip to the last paragraph.

Oh, good.

(Kepa proceeds to talk about a top-secret future project, which he then asks me to redact. It's a really good idea, everyone. Please look forward to Vague Secret Project.)

I would totally be down for that kind of thing. Anyway, I think this is about as much time as we've got for this, because I have to transcribe this. Any longer than this becomes a bit of a hellscape for me. So here's your chance to say anything you want to say. It'll be near the end so a lot of people will definitely read it.

Okay. Well, I'll fire up the *Death Road* upcoming thread again on TouchArcade pretty soon with some news on what we've been up to. TestFlight stuff in a couple of weeks or so.

That's all?

Pretty much. *Wayward Souls* update is coming in January, I think. We'll probably have it ready before the App Store freeze. It won't be a big update. It'll mostly be a fix for that teleportation bug. It used to be really rare, but it seems like every iOS version makes it a little more common. We have no idea what caused the bug, which has made it super-hard to fix. We're going to try

to just remove the effect entirely, which will look a little goofy, but it should work.

Okay.

That's pretty much it for January. After those two are out, we'll look at what we'll do next. We have a bunch of projects planned that we need to choose from.

How do you decide which one you're going to do? Is it a vote, or a fist fight?

I just pick one. It changes all the time, too. The plans go awry all the time. Once we're done with a project, we just see what we have kicking around. We have a lot of ideas kicking around. You want me to list them?

If you want to, go ahead.

So there's *Mage Gauntlet 2*, that's the more open-world one that we want to do. But before that, we want to do a follow-up to *Wayward Souls* that's a small-scale open world. Like, think *Castlevania* in terms of size, like *Symphony of the Night*. I mentioned *Death Road* iOS and the *Wayward Souls* update. I want to do *Sea Hunks*, have I talked about that?

You haven't. Do you want to talk about *Sea Hunks*?

Okay. You remember the game *Seaman*, for the Dreamcast?

Of course, yes.

Imagine *Seaman* for the Dreamcast, but weird. And romantic.

Kepa, it's already weird! (laughing) And depending on your tastes, maybe a *little* romantic.

Maybe. But it could be better in both of those aspects, I think. So for people who are too young to remember the Dreamcast, imagine you have a little fishbowl, and it has a goldfish in it. The goldfish has a human face, and the human face looks like Justin Bieber, or whoever you think is dreamy, I don't know. And you have to talk to it, because if you stop talking to it, it will die.

(I'm losing it laughing here)

From emotional neglect.

Oh man, I love this.

So that's a high-priority idea, I think.

You *have* to do this!

What else have I got? The *Wayward Souls* follow-up with the online multiplayer co-op. That might be PC-only, though. I don't know about cross-

device support for an online multiplayer game.

It's probably doable, but is it worth it? I don't know.

Yeah, we could probably do a mobile version without the multiplayer, but then people are going to be disappointed. So I don't know if it will come to mobile, period. Plus, it'll have a more complex control scheme since it's coming to PC first.

Well, it's still of interest.

For *Death Road* we actually kept the controls pretty simple, so that should be fine on iOS. Or *is* fine, because we've been testing it for months. Let's see. Those are the big ones, but I'm leaving out probably a couple more promising ideas we have.

Well, you don't want to let everyone in on what you're doing.

They can try to steal the idea if they want!

Alright, well, thanks a lot, Kepa. Thanks for giving us your time. I'm sure the readers will enjoy reading all of your insights, and about the upcoming *Sea Hunks*, which will clearly be a killer app. The next generation of gaming will be defined by *Sea Hunks*.

Marred forever, traumatized forever by *Sea Hunks*.

You will never be the same after *Sea Hunks*.

We'll see if that one happens. We can only pick one or two at a time. We have multiple teams, so we can actually work on three things at once.

If you don't do it, its legend will only grow.

Oh! There's also *Dad by the Sword*, but I'm not sure if that will be mobile, either. It's been on the back burner recently because of all the other stuff.

Well, it sounds like you have a lot to pick from. Good luck choosing.

Dad by the Sword will be next, but after that, maybe *Sea Hunks*. Maybe not.

Okay, well everyone reading this article, say in the comments how much you want *Sea Hunks* on a scale from eight to ten points.

Thanks again, Kepa. We'll talk to you again in the future.

Thanks again to Kepa for agreeing to this interview and being a good sport about letting us in on his future plans. Thanks also to you, kind readers, for supporting this idea. If you have any developers you're interested in hearing from, or if you are a developer interested in taking part in one of these interviews, please let me know in the comments below or by tweeting me at

[@RPGReload](). As for me, I'll be back next week with our penultimate **RPG Reload File**.

As you all know, I plan the schedule for these articles several months in advance. Sometimes that means I've penciled in a game that has been pulled from the App Store, and in those cases, I usually pick something else. Next week's originally-planned featured game was *Joe Dever's Lone Wolf*, which has disappeared as a result of all the issues with its iOS publisher, Bulkypix. Ordinarily, I would have selected something else to cover. But in a tragic coincidence, Mr. Joe Dever, the legendary author of the *Lone Wolf* series, passed away a couple of days ago. As such, I'd like to go ahead with this **RPG Reload** to honor him in whatever small way I can.

Next Week's Reload: *Joe Dever's Lone Wolf*